

Catholic Pioneers of Tyendinaga and Neighboring Townships

BY
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To Tyendinaga, in southern Hastings County, and to its neighboring townships came Irish Catholics, many who were fugitives from their native land. They were not poor, ignorant immigrants as some books on Pioneer Life would have us believe. They were, for the most part, descendants of the landed gentry of Ireland, men and women of culture and education who had been dispossessed of their lands for adhering to their religious and political beliefs and for sticking to their convictions in the face of dreadful odds. The Fighting Irish – willing to fight for their convictions, but not *yet* seeking to die for them. After all, of what use was a dead Irishman?

Into the Canadian wilderness they came, carrying a few treasured possessions, but in their hearts burned the fire of their Faith, and on their rude hearthstones they kept it burning brightly. In spite of overwhelming hardships – they were already schooled in the rigors of adversity – they never lost heart. In those early years when Holy Mass and the reception of the Sacraments were at infrequent intervals, they had a handhold on Heaven, their well-worn rosaries, and a childlike love for Our Blessed Lady. Each evening the whole family gathered for recitation of the beads, the Litany and daily prayers. When trials or sorrow struck, instead of turning them from their faith, as it might have done, it served only to send them to their knees, their beads in their fingers. All through their lives ran the refrain of the Irish *Te Deum*

Thanks be to God for the light and the darkness;
Thanks be to God for the hail and the snow;
Thanks be to God for the shower and the sunshine;
Thanks be to God for all things that grow: etc.

Even before their coming, southern Hastings had been the refuge of peoples driven from their homes by man's inhumanity to man. The United Empire Loyalists came as early as 1787, settling along the front townships and in Prince Edward County.

Hastings County lies in east central Ontario, north of the Bay of Quinte, an off-shoot of Lake Ontario. It was formed in 1792 by proclamation of Lieutenant-Governor Simcoe and named after a young Irish officer who had distinguished himself in the American Revolutionary War. He was Sir

Francis Rawdon, who changed his name to Rawdon-Hastings in 1790, assuming his mother's name of Hastings. In 1793 he succeeded his father as Earl of Moira and in 1817 was created Marquess of Hastings.

Tyendinaga became the haven of the Six Nations Indians. They comprised the tribes of the Mohawks, Oneidas, Cayugas, Onondagas, Senecas and Tuscaroras. Of these, the Mohawks were foremost in giving support to the British during the American Revolutionary War. In what is now New York State, their lands were in the Mohawk Valley, at the eastern end of those of the Six Nations Confederacy, and consequently were most exposed to the attacks of the Americans. The entire people of the Mohawks withdrew northward within the British lines. Already in the Mohawk Valley they had been divided into several distinct settlements. One of these was presided over by a chief named Deserontyou, known to the English as Captain John. During the war these people lived at Lachine, near Montreal, while the remainder of the Mohawks and other Six Nations established themselves at Fort Niagara. After the close of the war it was tentatively agreed between the Mohawks and the British authorities that they should be settled in the neighborhood of the Bay of Quinte. However, Captain Joseph Brant and the majority of the Mohawks changed their minds and asked for lands farther west. This was agreed to, and they were granted lands on the Grand River where Brantford now is situated. But Captain John Deserontyou and his followers refused to change, and the Government promised them lands in the Bay of Quinte. On 22 May, 1784, they landed where Deseronto now stands, and occupied the surrounding land. On 1 April, 1793, Sir John Graves Simcoe, Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada, granted to them the present township of Tyendinaga. Heavily timbered and well watered with streams and rivers teeming with fish, it was a natural hunting ground for the red men. The name was derived from the Indian name of Joseph Brant.

During the years 1818 and 1819, the Indians withdrew to the 20,000 acres comprising the broken front. A strip running east and west through the middle of the township (first concession, tier of lots south of the road, to middle of fourth concession) was purchased back from the Indians 20 July, 1820. They still retained the southern and northern sections of the township. On 23 December 1835, the northwestern corner was purchased and on April 15, 1843, the northeastern corner.

When almost all the front townships of Upper Canada were being settled there was very little immigration from Ireland. Migration began in considerable quantities in the 1820's, and the fact that Tyendinaga was then the only front township in which new lands were available in any quantity, made it especially attractive to the new-arriving Irish. Both in the original strip and in the later additions to the north, the Irish Catholics tended to keep in the eastern half of the township, while the settlers in the western half were more largely Protestant.

The first Catholic families to settle here were those of John and Michael Sweeney on the first concession. They came from King's County, now Offaly, on the border of Tipperary. John Sweeney, with a party of Irish Settlers, arrived at Kingston after weeks of travelling across the Atlantic on a sailing vessel in the early part of the nineteenth century. Leaving his wife and their three children at Kingston, he and a fellow passenger by the name of Robert Portt came by row-boat up the Bay of Quinte and landed in the woods near Deseronto. Going inland almost two miles they chose the sites of their future homes. Robert Portt picked the Hill Top, ever since known as Portt's Hill, where his descendants still reside. John Sweeney preferred the level country a mile or so east. They cleared the land and built log houses. John Sweeney's still stands. Three generations have been born there. The priest used to come from Kingston on horseback to say Mass in the large kitchen. People came from great distances to hear Mass and brought their children to be baptized, as the priest could come only once a year at first. Later he came more frequently. John Sweeney settled each of his sons on farms surrounding the old homestead, the deed of which is still held by the family. It was issued in the reign of George IV in 1820, and signed by Sir Peregrine Maitland, then Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada. It is said that both John and Michael Sweeney obtained the title to their lands by cutting the Right of Way through the forest opposite their lots.

Shortly after, about 1820, came the families of John Shaughnessey, Patrick Welch and the Murphys. Several priests, sprung from Murphy families, are now in different fields of Canada and the United States.

Patrick Martin came from Wexford County, Ireland, in 1818 and settled at Picton. At that time the people of Wexford County were referred to as « yellow bellies. » At the beginning of the nineteenth century, hurling was the popular sport of the day, a game something akin to « shinny ». As a distinguishing mark the Wexford team wore a bright yellow sash, hence the nickname. They held the championship of all Ireland for several years, and in time, the name was applied to all residents of the county. The Martins moved into Tyendinaga about 1828. The family is scattered today, but a granddaughter, Miss Kitty Martin, aged 86 at time of writing, still resides at Deseronto.

Michael Nealon came from Limerick County, Ireland, in 1818 and ran a saw-mill at Point Ann. Two of his brothers settled in the United States, while a nephew, Dennis, served in the Papal Army in Rome for three years. Michael was a staunch defender of the rights of the Irish in Ireland. He wrote a book in Gaelic about the oppression of the Irish by the English and bound it in goatskin. It would have been deemed treason if this book had been found in his possession. When he left Ireland he took it with him. At Point Ann he met Jane McKenney. She was not a Catholic, but they were married in Belleville by a priest. She did not join the church until about thirty years

before she died. They had ten children, five boys and five girls. The children were all baptized. One Sunday when they were taking one of the babies to church for baptism, instead of getting off at her own church as was the custom, she told her husband to drive on, that she would be baptized with the baby. Dennis, one of the sons, was an outstanding figure in the timber days. He had charge of several lumber camps in the woods for the Rathbun & Son Mill at Mill Point (later Deseronto). Michael Nealon took an active part in the affairs of the new community. He moved to Marysville about 1828. He was one of the signers of both the petitions mentioned below for the church. He was township clerk for a period of twenty-five years and served as Justice of the Peace for over thirty-five years. During that entire time, no appeal was ever made from his decision to the higher courts of Justice. The Indians called him the « White Father » and abided by and respected his judgment. By reason of his office, he had the authority to perform the marriage ceremony, but his wife prevailed upon him not to exercise it as she considered marriage a Sacrament solely within the priest's realm.

Another experience that fell to Michael Nealon's lot, and not a very pleasant one, happened after the Rebellion of 1837. He was arrested and taken to Fort Henry at Kingston, as the people then believed, to be shot as a traitor. A neighbor, who was an Orangeman, made the trip to Kingston to plead for him. He succeeded in proving that it was a case of mistaken identity, so Michael was freed. Margaret Toner was about seven years old then, but she never forgot that awful day when the soldiers rode away with her father, leaving her mother alone in the wilderness with her little ones crying and clinging to her skirts. He died Feb. 4, 1871, aged 73. Jane died in 1877.

Soon after the War of 1812, James Kenney and ----- O'Carroll, his wife, came from Queen's County, now Leix, Ireland, to Napanee. They operated a mill near that pioneer village, and there died. There was no Catholic cemetery nearer than Kingston, so they were buried in unmarked and unknown graves. When Tyendinaga was opened for settlement, their children, now grown to manhood and womanhood, took up a farm in the eastern part of the second concession. From here the majority moved elsewhere, and their history remains unknown. Edward Kenney was still here when he signed the petition mentioned below, and when his wife was buried in the new cemetery. He and his brother James lived for a time at Crook's Rapids, which was the early name for Hastings village in Northumberland County. Edward Kenney's daughter, Mary Jane, who was a baby when her mother died in Tyendinaga, married Michael Ryan of Westwood, afterwards of Peterborough, and their descendants are numerous throughout the Province of Ontario, among them being several members of religious communities. John Kenney remained in Tyendinaga, bought a farm north of Marysville, and married Anne, daughter of Michael Sweeney. They had twelve sons and daughters, who, with their

descendants, spread widely in Canada and especially in the United States, where they have wandered from Massachusetts to California.

Here two anecdotes may be given to illustrate the terrors which these Irish immigrants faced when they took ship for America. Anne Kenney, who came as a little child with her father Michael Sweeney, told her children how the voyage lasted three months, through stormy weather the greater part of the time. On one occasion mast and rigging went overboard and the ship was saved from capsizing only by the skill and presence of mind of one of the sailors (the captain was either drunk or inefficient) who cut the debris clear with a broad axe. One Stapleton (?), from whom John Kenney bought his farm, had a formula which he believed would ensure safety when, as he intended, he returned to Ireland; he would sail only on a ship with a cargo of timber. But when he sold his farm and took voyage from Quebec, it is presumed on a ship so laden, the formula failed: the ship was never heard of afterwards.

John McAuley was a native of Ballycastle, County Antrim. The family is said to be related to that of Catherine McAuley, who founded the Sisters of Mercy. Perhaps he was already a seaman: in any case, when he came to Kingston, Upper Canada, he became a pilot on Lake Ontario in the government service. His sister Catherine and other members of his family also came to Kingston. When he retired from the public service he settled on a farm in Tyendinaga, south-east of the little village of Lonsdale. Meanwhile, James McCullough, a blacksmith from County Monaghan and a staunch Presbyterian, landed at Quebec in 1832. His ship was the first on which took place an outbreak of cholera in that terrible plague year, but he escaped unscathed. He opened a blacksmith shop in what was commonly known as « the Sixth Town », the township of Sophiasburgh in Prince Edward County, on the south side of the Bay of Quinte. The little Catherine McAuley of Kingston became his wife, and entered at once on a daily fight for her religion. Her chief troubles did not come from her husband, who, although determined not to promote the errors of Popery, was a just and fair man. But in Sophiasburg township she was in the midst of a swarm of little « isms », most of them sprung from that hot-bed of new religions, the State of New York in the first half of the nineteenth century, and each local preacher or lay-reader or what-not of each petty sect considered it his manifest destiny to convert the stranger in their midst. She faced them all triumphantly, had her children baptized and brought up Catholics, and won her husband to the faith before he died. But long before this they had left « the Sixth Town » behind them. Word came of a farm for sale on the fourth concession road in Tyendinaga; they bought it and settled on it. Catherine McCullough found herself in the midst of Catholic neighbors and only four miles from a Catholic church, a distance she and her children readily walked on Sundays. It was something approaching heaven. In her old age she would declare that she

would gladly face the same ordeal again, but that she would not wish any daughter of hers to undergo it. Many priests and nuns are numbered among her descendants.

It is not generally known that Tyendinaga had its colony of refugees from the Great Famine of 1846-7. They settled at Shannonville, and, as elsewhere, the plague followed them. Martin Kenney, son of John Kenney, has related how, as a boy attending the school alongside the Tyendinaga church, he saw for days at a time a procession of funerals bringing the bodies of these poor people to the cemetery. Cut off in life from their fellow country-men of the township by the fact that, coming from the west of Ireland, they spoke little or no English while only a few of the earlier settlers spoke Irish, buried in unmarked graves, and leaving only a few survivors who soon departed from the township, the memory even that they existed has now disappeared.

In the early years of this century there still lived in the village of Lonsdale a local business-man named Bruin, who had searched all his life, and still hoped to find his relations. His only memory was that as a very small child he had been with his brothers and sisters on the wharves of Quebec. They became separated and he never saw them again. He was adopted by a non-Catholic family and brought up as a Protestant, but there could be little doubt that the parents, who must have died on shipboard or at the Quarantine Station on Grosse Isle, were Catholics.

Among the earliest we find also the families of Deaseys, Kennedys, Callaghans, Sullivans, Doyles, Meaghers, Killmurrays, Mackeys, Ryans, McGurus, D'Arcys, Powers, McNeils, McGinnises, Garlands, Lynches, Curleys, Conways, Scanlans – and there were others. Later arrivals included Toners, McFerrans, McAuleys, Currys, Drummeys, Farrells (Patrick Farrell married a daughter of Michael Sweeney; he lived to be almost a centenarian), Foxes, Hurleys, Wests, Nashes, etc. After the purchase of the northern part of the township from the Indians, in 1835 and 1843, many families settling there bore names already well-known in the township: some of them were off-shoots from the homes to the south, some were newcomers from Ireland. Among new names were those of Byrne, Boland, Buckley, Casey, Culhane, Condon, Coffey, Carney, Daley, Dempsey, Donoghue, Eagan, Fitzgerald, Ford, Griffin, Hanley (John and William Hanley, brothers, came from Ireland just about a century ago and cleared the land around the present village of Read, where the church for northern Tyendinaga was built), Hart, Halloran, Hefferan, Lally, McCarthy, McCabe, McDermott, Mullany, Naphin, O'Brien, O'Leary O'Hara, Roche, Shannon, Tighe.

James Toner came from Cookstown, Tyrone Co., and settled at Murrysville; then moved to Sydney, the second township west of Tyendinaga, where he married Elizabeth Doyle. They had five children. At least two great-grandsons are priests and several descendants are Sisters. One son, Francis, married Margaret Nealon, daughter of Michael Nealon. They had

fourteen children; two died in babyhood, and for over fifty years there was not another death among them. Francis moved to Marysville where they lived a number of years; then removed to Moore Township, Lambton County.

John McFerran came from Belfast, County Antrim, Ireland, in 1835. Two years later his wife, Mary, his son John, and his daughter Ellen, came out. When they left Ireland, William IV was on the throne and when they landed at Quebec the first news that greeted them was that the young Victoria was queen. They bought a farm on the fourth concession. During the Rebellion of 1837 the younger John went to Toronto and enlisted with the Army. In 1850 he married Bridget Murphy, who was born in Marysville parish in 1829. Some years later, they, too, moved to Lambton County. Of eighteen grandchildren, two entered the convent.

The Mission of Belleville, of the Kingston Diocese, comprised also Trenton and Marysville, including Read and Stirling. Baptismal Records begin in the year 1829. The Rev. Father Michael Brennan was the first pastor.¹ He was a native of Mooncoin, County Kilkenny, Ireland. He studied at the College of Iona, Glengarry, which was a Seminary for the training of priests that Bishop Macdonell had opened in 1821 in his own house at St. Raphael's and named after the famous ancient Irish monastery off the west coast of Scotland. He was ordained at St. Raphael's church, Glengarry, August 28th, 1829. He came to Belleville in 1829, where he built a stone church. He built a stone church at Sugar Island and a frame church at Picton. Prior to his coming to Belleville Mass was said in a small church located on the present Collegiate grounds at the end of Patterson Street.² When the stone church was built this building was turned into a school. He introduced the Loretto Nuns to Belleville in 1857. Father Brennan died October 31, 1869, aged 73, after having spent more than 40 years in the parish. The Catholic population of the Mission in 1834 was listed at 1135 with four Catholic churches.³

Father Brennan made the trip through the wilderness to his missions on horseback, carrying his vestments, altar stone and sacred vessels. He baptized the children, performed the ceremony of matrimony, and on some occasions

¹ Sources : Parish records of St. Raphael's and of Belleville.
Bibl.: Canada *and its Provinces* Vol XI, pp. 11-114: H. A. SCOTT, « The Roman Catholic Church east of the Great Lakes, 1760-1912 ». *The Catholic*, Nov. 10, 1841.
Life and Letters of Rev. Mother Theresa Dease.

² Records : Archbishop's House, Kingston, Ont.

³ *A Brief Account together with Observations, made during a visit in the West Indies, and a tour through the United States of America, in parts of the years 1832-3; together with a Statistical Account of Upper Canada.* By DR. THOMAS ROLPH (Dundas, U. C.: 1836), pp. 268-9.

blessed the graves of those who had died since his last visit. Mass was usually celebrated at the home of one of the settlers, in some places at regular intervals, at others, whenever the priest could make the trip. When it was known that he had arrived in the neighborhood, the message was passed around from one family to another. Very often the children would walk two or three miles through the bush to carry the news to their neighbors. They, in turn, would notify the families living beyond them. Another office the parish priest often filled was that of « matchmaker ». He would sort out a lonely bachelor and take him along to call on a family with an unattached daughter. If all went well, and it usually did, on his next trip he would marry the couple. On one occasion a mother with several small children arrived whose husband had died aboard ship. The good pastor knew of a man whose wife had passed away leaving him with helpless little ones. While this could not be spoken of as a « love match » it turned out very well. They lived to a ripe old age and raised a family that was a credit to the community.

During these early years of Tyendinaga, Mass was celebrated at John Sweeney's house. His daughter, Mrs. Deasey, was born, baptized, married and died in the same house, which as we said before, still stands. By the 1830's the settlement had become sufficiently prosperous to think of building a church. Under the direction of Bishop MacDonell, of the new Diocese of Kingston (Regiopolis), and at that time a member of the Legislative Council of Upper Canada, and of Father Brennan, a petition was presented, on 6 May, 1835, to Sir John Colborne, Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada, asking for a grant of lot 24, first concession, south of the road, as a site for a church. The petition was signed by Bishop Alexander MacDonell, Father Michael Brennan, John Sweeney, Edward Landers, Michael Nealon, and in all, 128 laymen, doubtless the whole, or nearly the whole, Catholic adult male population of the township. This petition is of great historical value both because of its subject-matter and also, and especially, because it is a unique record of the early settlers. It is remarkable that every signature is obviously distinct, and that, although the spelling of family names is sometimes curious, no person signed with his mark. (The petition is printed in full as an appendix to this paper.)

This petition was considered in the Executive Council at Toronto on 8 December, 1835 (by which time Sir Francis Bond Head had succeeded Sir John Colborne as Lieutenant Governor), and rejected on the ground that the lot was not vacant. The Tyendinaga Catholics, knowing the lot never to have been occupied, applied to Samuel S. Wilmot, Land Surveyor, the representative for this district of the Commissioner of Crown Lands. He informed them that, although a certain Ebenezer Sheppard had bid in the lot at a Government auction many years before, he had never fulfilled the conditions of sale and it therefore relapsed to the Crown. The petition had been put in the hands of James Henderson, who seems to have been a professional agent in Toronto for carrying on business of this kind, and on 25 May, 1836, he, as Agent for the Catholic Inhabitants of Tyendinaga,

presented a second petition.⁴ This petition bore the names (not signatures) of Bishop MacDonell of Kingston, Bishop Gaulin of Toronto (who had been appointed coadjutor to Bishop MacDonell in 1833), Rev. Michael Brennan of Murray, James D'Arcy, Michael Nealon, James Brennan (these three evidently representing the Catholic laymen who had signed the first petition). Being supported by the evidence of Wilmot, it was approved in Council 18 August, 1836.

The local tradition in Tyendinaga is that John Sweeney obtained the grant, and runs thus: In 1832 a committee was appointed comprising John Sweeney, Michael Sweeney, John Shaughnessey and Michael Nealon. At that time travel was a long and difficult task. If one man had to make a trip to some distant place he took care of the business for the entire community. It so happened that John Sweeney was making the trip to York, now Toronto, a journey requiring several days travel. The neighbors gathered at his house the previous evening and brought their money to have him make payments or file on their lands for them. They delegated him to interview the Lieutenant Governor, Sir Francis Bond Head, and ask for an acre of land on which to build a church and which could be used as a burying ground. So well did he succeed that he returned with a deed to one hundred acres for church purposes, free of charges for all time. This deed was registered in the name of Bishop Alexander MacDonell in 1839.

The church was built in 1837, a small stone building heated by a box stove. Later an addition was built, and it served the parish for close to a century. Shortly after the completion of the church Bishop MacDonell came from Kingston to dedicate the church, bless the cemetery and administer Confirmation. He came by boat to a wharf where Deseronto now stands. He was met by the parishioners and rode in a lumber wagon over a trail through the forest. It must have been a very trying journey for the Bishop, for his health was already failing, but his enthusiasm and zeal never let him relax when there was a task to be done. Father Bourke was the first regular pastor of the new parish, which was placed under the Patronage of the Holy Name of Mary.

Father Charles Bourke⁵ was born at Ballycastle, County Mayo, Ireland, in 1818. He was ordained in St. Paul's church, Toronto, December 2, 1838, by Bishop Gaulin. He was assistant at Kingston from December, 1838, to January, 1840. (The record from the Archbishop's House, Kingston, lists him as being pastor of Marysville 1837-56.) He died at Marysville, December 16,

⁴ Public Archives of Canada : Upper Canada Land Petitions, T 20-14.

⁵ Sources : Archives of Kingston Archdiocese; Kingston Baptismal Records; his Monument.

Bib. « Marysville » by J. M. KENNEY, a manuscript study copies of which are in the parochial and diocesan archives, and the Public Archives of Canada at Ottawa.

The Catholic Oct. 25, 1843.

1856 and was buried under the church there, where a monument has been erected to his memory. Father Thomas Walsh was pastor from 1856 to 1858. Father Michael Mackay was born in Templemore, Tipperary Co., February 13, 1813. He made his home with his aunt, Mrs. John Sweeney. He was ordained in Kingston in 1848. He was pastor from 1858 until 1893, when he was followed by Father Quinn.

Another station attended by Father Brennan was at Picton, Prince Edward County.⁶ Father Brennan built a frame church there in 1830, making fortnightly trips. The land was given by the Rev. Mr. Macaulay, an English minister who also gave the land for the Anglican church. It was named St. Gregory's. In 1839 a stone church was built by Rev. Father Lalor, first pastor. It was dedicated the same year by Bishop MacDonell and Bishop Gaulin, assisted by the Very Rev. M. Brennan, of Belleville, Rural Dean; the Rev. Angus MacDonell, Vicar General of Kingston Diocese; the Rev. E. P. Roche of Prescott; the Rev. P. Dollard; and the Very Rev. Vicar General Gordon of Hamilton. The old church became the first Catholic School.

Father Murtagh Lalor⁷ was born in Queen's County, Ireland. He studied at the College of Iona, Glengarry. He was ordained in 1829 by Bishop MacDonell, and was assistant at Kingston, 1829-31. He was in charge of Bytown, 1831 to Nov., 1832. During the cholera epidemic he was indefatigable in working among the sick and dying. He was in charge of Niagara parish from Nov. 1832, until May, 1833. He was pastor at Adjala, Gore of Toronto, etc., from May, 1833, to May, 1837. He completed the church at Tecumseh and built churches at Carleton Place and Albion. He became pastor of Picton in 1837, where he built the stone church. Father Lalor ruled his mission for 34 years. He was deeply loved and respected by his people. When he resigned in 1871 he retired to Ireland, near Marlboro. There he died in 1886 at a very advanced age.

Father Lalor was succeeded by the Rev. J. Brennan, a nephew of the Rev. Michael Brennan.⁸ He was born January 20, 1839, at Mooncoin, in Kilkenny, and educated at St. Patrick's College, Carlow. He came to Canada in 1862 and was ordained in December by the Right Rev. Dr. Horan, Bishop of Kingston.

At Trenton,⁹ Mass was offered in 1832 in the home of J. V. Murphy. In 1833 the church was completed and was the first church of any denomination in Trenton. It was called St. Peter's in Chains. Trenton remained a part of Belleville parish until 1874. It comprised, besides Trenton, Brighton,

⁶ *Illustrated Historical Atlas of the Counties of Hastings and Prince Edward* by H. BELDON Co. (Toronto : 1878).

⁷ Sources : Archives, Archdiocese of Toronto.
Bibl. *Jubilee Volume of the Archdiocese of Toronto; The History of St. Paul's Parish, Toronto*, by the REV. E. KELLY (Toronto : 1922).

⁸ *Historical Atlas of Hastings and Prince Edward* (1878)

⁹ Archives, Kingston Diocese.

Frankford and Codrington. The Rev. E. P. McEvoy was first pastor. A new church was built in 1874.

Read Parish,¹⁰ originally called Blessington, was established August 25, 1854, by the Right Rev. Patrick Phelan, Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese. Mass was said first at the home of John Lally. In the month of August, Rev. Thomas A. McMahan was appointed pastor of the newly formed parish. The following year he built a frame church which served the needs of the congregation until 1893, when the present church, a larger and more pretentious brick building, was erected.

The Rev. George Brophy became Pastor of Read parish in 1862, and he in turn was followed by the Rev. John Meade in September, 1882. Due to the infirmities of old age, Father Meade gave up the parish in September, 1885. The Rev. Thomas McCarthy was appointed to succeed him as Parish Priest of Read – a position he held until the time of his death in January, 1935. The present incumbent, the Rev. R. A. Carey, followed Father McCarthy.

The strong Irish Faith of the congregation may be seen in the fact that, up to the year 1901, thirty-three boys and girls from Read had become priests or nuns. Since then, girls of the parish in steady procession have entered Religious Communities, while at present six of the boys born and brought up in Read are on active service as priests in Kingston diocese.

This wealth of vocations in a small country parish is, no doubt, largely due to the fact that Catholics invariably marry Catholics. It is a fact, perhaps unique in the history of Ontario, that during his fifty years as Pastor of Read, the Rev. Father McCarthy was not once called upon to assist at a mixed marriage.

North of Tyendinaga lies the township of Hungerford. This was the hunting ground of the Mississauga Indians. The earliest settlement was at Sugar Island, so named for the maple-sugar bush that grew there. Every spring the Indians came to it to make their year's supply of sugar. Owen Dirkin and Martin Donohue located here in 1826, followed by Philip Huffman and Mike Conlin. One story goes that a Richard Woodcock, a United Empire Loyalist, traded the hundred acres of land given him in Murray township for 1600 acres of land near the present town of Tweed in 1812 and was the first white settler. His son Oliver married Ellen Hawkins in 1844 and became a Catholic.

The story of the Pioneers of Tyendinaga is similar to that of most early settlers – a struggle for existence. The first settlers came by barge, disembarking at some favorable place along the shore. They trekked overland, carrying their belongings. When they arrived at their tract of land their troubles were not over. They were at the mercy of the elements until they cut down trees and built a shelter. Black flies, mosquitos, ague and wild animals added to their discomfort. Their furniture was very crude, their cooking done over the fireplace which served as a heating unit as well. Often they moved in before the floor was laid or the door hung. The logs for the houses were usually hewed on two sides. Into space between the logs, they pegged wedge shaped rails and plastered them smooth with clay. A puncheon floor – slabs

¹⁰ Archives, Kingston Diocese.

split from logs – was laid down. A trough roof was used by many. The logs were barked, split, and a deep V cut the length of the log. These were laid closely together with the V-side up. Other V-shaped logs were fitted over the joints, the rounded side up. This kind of roof required no rafters nor sheeting, was watertight, cool in summer and warm in winter. The doors were fitted with wooden hinges and a wooden latch. Sometimes, before glass windows could be obtained, cloth or thin oiled skin was stretched across the window opening. Shutters were hung outside to close the house against wild animals and storms.

Bridget Murphy used to tell her grandchildren stories of wild animals. During the winter the wolves would come around the house and howl. The family would throw burning logs from the fireplace into the yard to keep them away from the door. Once when she was a girl raking hay some distance from the house, she glanced into the woods alongside her and saw a mother bear and her two cubs playing on a fallen tree. Terrified, but with the presence of mind the early settlers required, she made no notice of having seen them but went on raking her way across the field until she was far enough away to throw down her rake and run for the house. The men of the neighborhood organized a posse to hunt the bears but they had disappeared into the bush.

To the women fell the task of clothing the family and not only of feeding it, but of procuring the food, while the men cleared the land and planted grain. As soon as enough trees were felled to admit the sunlight, potatoes were grubbed in around the stumps. Peas, beans, carrots, turnips, onions, squash, pumpkin and corn were planted. They gathered wild berries, cherries and gooseberries and dried them on boards in the sun or on stump tops. Wild plums were made into a heavy preserve with maple syrup and stored in earthen crocks. They gathered greens, dandelions, sour dock, nettles and other leaves in season to round out scanty meals. Fish was obtained and wild turkeys, pigeons and venison. Each family made its own supply of maple sugar.

During the first winters food was often very scarce. Even after the grain was grown and harvested it had to be carried many miles to be ground into flour. Very often it was boiled whole all one day for the next day's food. Corn was soaked in lye made from wood ashes and the hulls rubbed off. Then it was boiled and eaten with milk. A sauce made from dried apples was a standby of the winter months, and in leaner years, «punkin sass,» a sort of sweet obtained by boiling and straining pumpkin, then cooking the juice down until it was a thick molasses-like mass. Buttermilk pop and pancakes were common fare. Many a family subsisted on boiled potatoes and salt during a hard winter.

Live stock was scarce, as housing and feeding it during the winter was a problem. Cows were usually dry throughout the winter months because the barns were cold and their feed consisted chiefly of oat straw and pumpkins. Oxen were used at first in place of horses. When fodder was scarce the cattle browsed on the tender shoots of newly felled trees. Sheep were kept to supply wool to clothe the family. The pigs were turned loose in the woods to fatten on beechnuts and roots, often to fall prey to wild animals.

The families who came in a little later had fewer obstacles to overcome. The story comes down that they would go to Johnny Doyle's on the fourth concession. He would house them until their land was obtained, and the neighbors felled the trees and built their home.

These Pioneers were very faithful in the practise of their religion. There is a story of a Mrs. McGuinness who carried her baby a distance of over twenty miles to Belleville to have it baptized. Her husband walked with her over a blazed trail through the forest to the highway and returned to meet her the following day. The first person buried in the cemetery of Marysville was Mrs. Edward Kenney. The date is given traditionally as 1834, but it was probably at least two years later. If 1834 is correct, then the Catholic people must have been already confident that they would obtain the farm lot. Her coffin was made of rough pine boards procured at a neighborhood mill. Four men at a time carried it on their shoulders over a trail three miles through the forest, the neighbors taking each his turn. This grave was dug east and west. Later it was decided to dig the graves north and south, but this grave was never moved. Her sister-in-law was buried beside her, the grave running north and south. The two graves can still be traced (or could some years ago) close to the eastern wall of the old church. The first funeral from the church was that of Mrs. Williams from the fourth concession, who died in 1839.

Assisting at Mass was not always an easy matter. Usually the people came on foot, sometimes a distance of ten miles or more. The trails were often deep with mire. Then the women walked barefoot carrying their shoes and stockings with them. They would wash their feet in the ditch, dry them on their petticoats, don their shoes and stockings and walk proudly into church. The men usually wore high leather boots. Later, with more prosperous times, the father and mother rode horseback, carrying the smaller children while the older ones trudged alongside.

One of the beautiful traditions coming down to us is of Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve in the new church. This was the highlight of their lives. It meant weeks of work and of sacrifice on the part of the little community. The church was decorated with evergreens and red berries. It was lighted by candles massed in the sanctuary and in the windows. On each window sill a rack was set at an angle. Holes were bored into this board to hold about thirty candles in tiers. These candles were made by the parishioners, and were extra large. What mattered it if many homes were lighted only by firelight for the rest of the winter months by thus using their precious supply of candle wax? The choir was brought out from Belleville and music was supplied by several violins and a dulcimer. The people came from far and near by sleighloads and on foot to pack the little church. It was a story retold many times before blazing hearths, a story that lost nothing in the telling.

At a time when food was none too plentiful and woefully lacking in variety, the black or hard fast during Lent and Advent was particularly hard on the Pioneers. No meat was allowed on week days and only at the main meal on Sunday, with none of the dispensations we enjoy today. It was not until the early Sixties that this ruling was modified.

The children learned their prayers and catechism from their mother. The father usually led the prayers at night. As soon as there were enough families

in a community a school section was formed and a school erected, though many children learned the fundamentals of education at home.

But life was not all a grind. There were many kinds of entertainment. There were parties and dances galore. There were logging bees, house building bees, barn raisings, quiltings. There was card playing often by the light of a smoking « dip », and many an evening of story telling – perhaps some tall stories – stories of banshees and will-o-wisps, of the black curse, of the bewitched, of haunted houses, until the children crept trembling into bed and covered their heads with the bed covers. There were stories told in song and verse of the land far over the sea. My mother, who is past seventy six, still repeats for her grandchildren long poems that she learned from her grandfather when she was a small child.

It is the usual opinion of the Irish people that the banshee does not cross the ocean, but Mrs. John Kenney, who lived on the adjoining farm, and others, declared that they heard the banshee at the death of « old Mrs. Ryan », on a farmsouth of the second concession road, directly north of Marysville.

And there was style among the women folk. Nights of agony spent in curl papers, hours with the curling iron. The grandmothers would smile at their granddaughters' and great granddaughters' « beautification ». They had buttermilk bleaches and bran in cheesecloth to take the shine off one's nose. Mullen leaves gently applied brought out the roses in young cheeks, (never, never in public, though). After a summer in the harvest field, tansy poultices removed the tan and freckles and likewise the skin. The irritation was relieved somewhat by applications of sweet cream from the cream crock. When a maiden acquired a husband, henceforth she must put up her hair, and wear a cap – cotton for every day, silk and lace on Sundays and festive occasions. No longer could she wear a hat – a bonnet must forever now conceal her tresses in public. With the coming of better years homespuns gave way to silks and laces. Large houses were built and finely furnished.

At first potash was the only product that had any money market – about twenty dollars a barrel. Soon logging was an important industry. Later farm produce was hauled to Kingston to the Fort. A 200 lb. barrel of pork bringing \$20.00, a barrel of flour from \$7.00 to \$12.00.

There is little record of crime in the early days. Marriage was considered a permanent arrangement even among non-Catholics, and people were too busy to have time for wrongdoing. The hospitality of these people is well known. No stranger was ever refused shelter, food or any other necessity. If a person ill or injured should stumble to the doorstep, he was tenderly nursed and cared for, then allowed to go on his way without any feeling of having obligated himself.

There are many stories lost with the passing of time and the death of the Pioneers. Some are almost legends, scarcely known to the present generation. There is the « Ghost of Meagher's Mill ». Meagher's sawmill was situated on the Salmon River, on the road west of the present village of Lonsdale. A young man was drowned in the mill pool. It being a sudden and violent death, the inhabitants believed that his soul would not rest because he had not been prepared to die. Nobody would work at the mill. At last they brought the priest to the spot. All the neighbors gathered and said the rosary,

the litany and prayers for the dead. Henceforth, the Ghost was laid. There were fireballs seen on dark nights before storms. Not knowing any scientific explanations they believed it must be something supernatural. Many weird tales were recounted. Perhaps a touch of spirits within gave rise to the belief in spirits without. At least it had one redeeming feature, that of sending those who witnessed it, or heard of it, to their knees to beg God's protection from evil.

When families moved on to greener pastures there was a finality in the parting that was heart-rending. Michael Toner tells of an incident when he was a very small child. His uncle moved to Peterborough. His mother, Margaret Nealon, and her sister-in-law were very close friends. The day they left, Michael Nealon, his grandfather, drove the family to the train and stopped in at the Toner house to say goodbye. As the sleigh drove away, little Michael and his mother stood at the door and waved until the sleigh was out of sight, then without a word she turned, went in and closed the door. She never saw them again. But the sound of that door closing always stayed with the boy. A year ago he met a son of that family, who remarked that Michael was one of his cousins that he had never seen before. Michael Toner replied: « I saw you. It is just eighty years ago. You were a baby in your mother's arms when Grandfather drove you to the station when you were leaving Tyendinaga and you were wearing a little red wool cap. »

Years later the name of Tyendinaga station was changed to Marysville, named after Our Blessed Lady. A faith so firmly planted against such terrific odds has born fruit. There have been sixteen young men in the parish so far, called to the Priesthood and about forty young women are in various religious orders. But it does not stop there. Many of the Pioneers moved on to wider horizons and the exact number of religious among their descendants has not been obtained. Tyendinaga has given more than its share to the drift from the farm to the city and to the migration from Canada to the United States. There are people of Tyendinaga origin probably in every state of the Union, and the township has contributed extensively to the growth of Toronto, Rochester, Buffalo, Cleveland, Detroit and Chicago.

The torches that were so bravely lighted at those humble hearth-fires have been carried far and wide and pray God that they may continue to burn until this earth resembles the starlit skies at midnight.

One characteristic I have noticed about the descendants of those Pioneers is the way they still cling together. In a distant city if you happen to meet someone whose people once hailed from there, and you mention that your family did also, you are received with open arms. And then the QUESTIONS! Perhaps the following bit of verse might explain what I mean. The names are purely fictitious.

THE HOUSEWIFE AND THE SALESMAN

So it's magazines you're selling?

I've heard all that before.

I'll thank you to remove your foot

So I can close my door.

Why don't you get a decent job?
You just came into town?
You came from where? Don't tell me now!
Well, well! Won't you sit down?

And do you know the Flannigans,
The Finnigans, the Coyles.
McGuires and big Tom Sullivans,
McClellans and the Boyles,

And Tim and Jerry Houlihan,
Bid Hayes? For goodness sake!
And Ann and Maggie Johnson,
And Jimmy Burns, the rake!

O'Haras, Toolles and Higginses,
The Martins? Gracious me?
Oh, no ! I never lived there, but
My mother did, you see.

There's the Wards and Micky Curran,
McDonnells and McLowds;
The Shannons and the Callahans,
The Murrays and McDowds.

And you are Kate McKinnon's boy!
I can't believe it's true.
Come in and have a cup of tea.
Your welcome as the dew.

Grateful acknowledgement is made to the following who have been of great assistance in the preparation of this paper: Dr. James F. Kenney, Public Archives, Ottawa; the Rev. Leo J. Byrne, Archbishop's House, Kingston; the Rev. C. F. O'Gorman, Marysville; the Rev. John B. O'Reilly, Archbishop's House, Toronto; the Very Rev. J. T. Hanley, Smith's Falls; Mrs. Catherine O'Neill, Toronto; Mr. Frank McAuliffe, Lonsdale. Their Excellencies the Most Rev. M. J. O'Brien, Archbishop of Kingston, and the Most Rev. J. C. McGuigan, Archbishop of Toronto, very kindly made possible the use of records under their control.

APPENDIX

Petition for a Grant of Land for Catholic Church purposes in the
Township of Tyendinaga

(Public Archives of Canada : Upper Canada Land Petitions,
T 19, no. 20)

Unto His Excellency Major General Sir John Colborne K.C.B.
Lieutenant Governor of the Province of Upper Canada, &c, &c, &c,

The Petition of the Right Revd. Alexander MacDonell Catholic Bishop
of Regiopolis, of the Rev^d. Michael Brennan, and of the Roman Catholic
Inhabitants of the Township of Tyendanago

Humbly Sheweth

That the Catholics of the Township of Tyendanago labour under
great inconvenience, and disadvantage for want of a convenient place of
Worship having no Church, or Chapel nearer to them than Belleville a
distance of eighteen or twenty miles, on which account their women, and
weaker part of their Families are prevented from attending Divine Service
on the Sundays, and thus deprived of the benefit of their Religion.

Your Petitioners therefore, beg leave to lay a state of their situation
before Your Excellency, in hopes that your Excellency will be pleased to
take their case into consideration and grant them Lot N^o. twenty four
south range of the first Concession South of the Road of the said
Township of Tyendanago, in order to erect a Church on it as the most
central and convenient place for Your Petitioners, and also for the
Catholic Inhabitants of the neighbouring Townships of Richmond,
Hungerford, Sheffield, and part of Sophiaburg.

And your Petitioners as in duty bound will ever pray

Alex^r. Macdonell Ep. R.
Michael Brennan M, Cp

John Sweeney	John Condon
Edward Landers	Terrance Fitzpatrick
Michael Nealon	Daniel Dunavan
Daniel Callihan	Francis Murphy
John Mackey	Barney Mcginis
John McGuire	Micul Black
John Sweeney	John Kilmurry
Charles Sweeney	John Lavery
Thomes Calighan	Cornelius Callighan
Daniel Desmond	Owen Doyal
Thimoty Ryan	Denis Sullivan
Denis Nealon	Denis Killty
John White	John Sullivan
Thomas Magurn	John Doyal
William Magurn	James Brenan
Patt Campbell	Patt Brenan
William Landers	Michael Doyal
Richerd Condon	Morty Callighan
Gerimia Hays	Cornelius Callighan

Thomas Dorcy	Daniel Shay
Patt Dorcy	John Shaughnessy
Thomas Landers	Michl Shea
Christopher Killmurry	Patrick Fitz'errald
Robert Landers	John man
John Nealon	Thomas Treacy
Joseph Megurn	Robert Dowman
Peter Kilmurry	Patt Walsh
John Kenny	Micul Walsh
Daniel Power	James Walsh
John Howlet	Henery Linch
James McNeil	Patt Donigan
James Dorcy sen ^f .	John Eagan
James Dorcy Ju ⁿ .	Patrick Conwan
Richard Connoly	John Clifft
Owen Clifft	Walter Deacy
Hugh Curley	Robert Short
Brien Curley	Michael Moroney
Patrick Curly	Thomas Deacy
Peter Burns	John Donoley
James T Kiely	Patt McNicle
Patrick Dowlan	Michael Donavan
Patt Murphy	Patrick Wallice
John Dowlan	Lawrence Killmurry
Thomas Murphy	John Dugan
Richard Foran	James Mury
Michal Meginnis	Thomas Murry
Jams Conway	John Connor
Mic ^l . Conway	Paul Vellio
James Magher	James O Sullivan
William Magher	Mic ^l . Sullivan
James Sweeney	William Saughnessy
William Borden	Thomas Hays
James Borden	John Harrison
Philip Crewford	Patt Sullivan
James Smith	William Megher
James Derreen	Thomas Magher
John Derreen	Patrick Sweeney
Antony Maher	Thimothy O. Leary
John Maher	Edward Kenny
Robert Maher	Barned Scanlin
Micul Maher	Barned Murphy
Michael Nowlan	Mich ^l . Sweeney
James Garland	Tho ^s . Sweeney
John Darcy	Mich ^l . Sweeney

[In some cases the Christian name read above as « Patt may be Batt.»]

Extract from Minutes of Executive Council of Upper Canada, 8 December, 1835 (Public Archives of Canada, Land Book R, p. 222):

The Right. Rev. Alexander Macdonell on behalf of the Roman Catholic Inhabitants of the Township of Tyendinaga Praying for a Grant of Lot. No. 24. South Range of the first Concession South of the Road in Tyendinaga to erect a Church thereon.

Not recommended, as the Lot does not appear to be vacant.

Extract from Minutes of Executive Council of Upper Canada, 18 August, 1836 (Public Archives of Canada, Land Book S, p. 107):

Catholic Inhabitants of Tyendinaga—

Revised their Petition which was read in Council on the 28th July last, respecting the application they made on the 6th May 1835 for Grant of Lot No. 24 in the 1st. Concession South of the road in the Township of Tyendinaga, for the purpose of erecting a Roman Catholic Church thereon, which application was refused because the lot not appearing to be vacant. Read the Report of Samuel S. Wilmot. Deputy Surveyor Stating that the above lot is at the disposal of the crown.

Recommended.